

Judith Rich Harris, 80, Dies; Author Played Down the Role of Parents

By Katharine Q. Seelye

Jan. 1, 2019

Judith Rich Harris, a psychologist, was writing college textbooks on child development when she suddenly realized she didn’t believe what she was telling readers about why children turn out the way they do.

She had her own theory: that children are influenced more by their genes and peers than by their parents. It was a revolutionary thought and ran counter to what most psychologists — and most parents — believed. She wrote it up for an academic journal and won a prestigious prize from the American Psychological Association.

Ms. Harris, who died on Saturday at her home in Middletown, N.J., at 80, was dismissed by some. She did not have a doctorate, was not writing from an academic perch and was belittled by some critics as little more than “a grandmother from New Jersey.”

Show Full Article